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THE
HILLFORD
CONFIRMATION



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The Hillford Confirmation

RIVINGTONS

London	<i>Waterloo Place</i>
Oxford	<i>High Street</i>
Cambridge	<i>Trinity Street</i>

The Hillford Confirmation

A TALE

BY M. C. PHILLPOTTS

*Draw, Holy Ghost, Thy sevenfold veil
Between us and the fires of youth;
Breathe, Holy Ghost, Thy freshening gale
Our fever'd brow in age to soothe.*



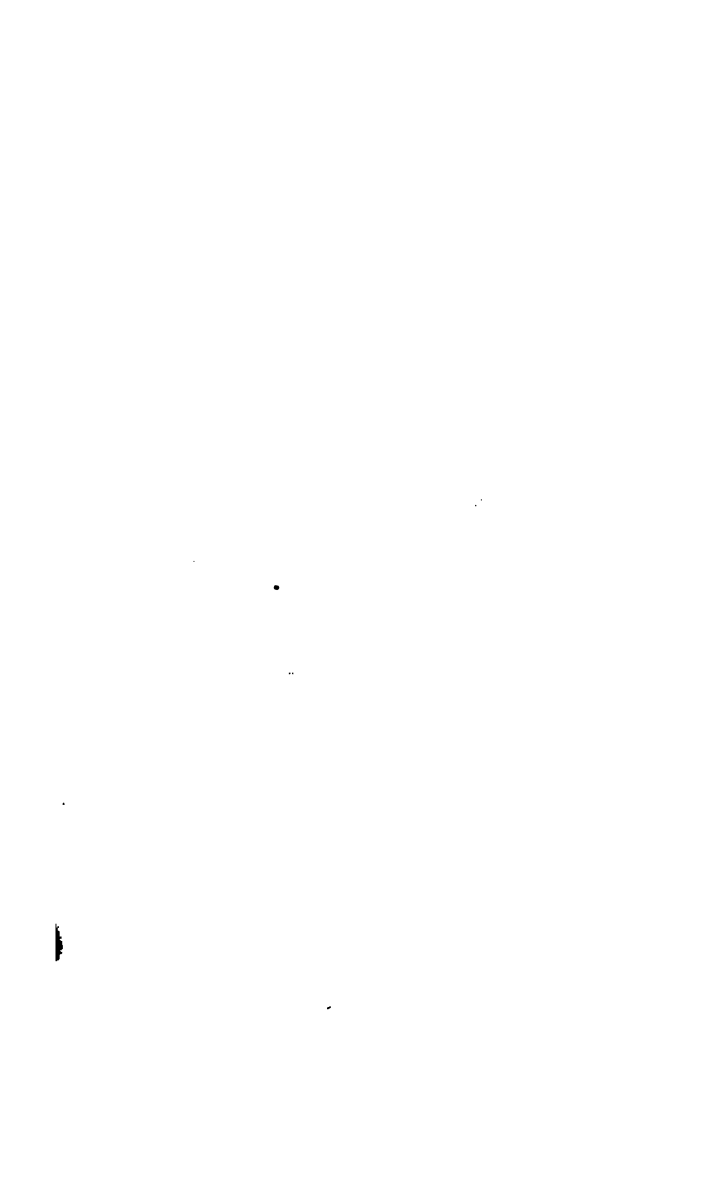
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THE HILLFORD CONFIRMATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE parish church of Hillford stood amidst lofty elm trees, in the centre of a beautiful English village.

It was an out-of-the-way place, far removed from any large town, and out of the beaten track of travellers. It had not even a railway station within six miles of it, so that it is not to be wondered at that the villagers were homely, and their ideas simple, and primitive in their habits.

One cold, blustering day in March, a group of girls stood lingering on the school-steps after the younger children had run
A

home, seeming much interested in the subject they were discussing.

"What did your mother say, Bessie?" said Jane Prynne, a tall, heavy-looking girl of fifteen.

"Mother does not care one way or the other," said Bessie Sutton, "she'd as soon I was confirmed as not, if I've a mind to it, only I know she'll make a fuss if I say I'll have a new bonnet for it; but I shall leave that till nearer the time, and then I shall tell her I mean to have a white net one, with red roses in it."

"I do believe," said Sarah Gardiner, a sharp, unamiable-looking girl, "that the bonnet and the roses is all you'll be thinking of till May."

"You've no right to say that, Sarah," said Bessie; "of course I wish to be confirmed, now I am grown so big; and if I am to go to Fairfield to the bishop, I'll go decent, you may depend, whatever it may cost."

Bessie, as she said this, gave a toss to her pretty head, and looked rather scornfully at Sarah's sallow complexion, and short, stumpy

figure. Poor child ! she forgot the greatest ornament she might have wished to wear, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

“Come home with me, Jane,” said Sophy Turnbull, a small, fair child, who had not yet spoken.

Jane Prynne rose from the step on which she had been seated, and followed Sophy at once, and the two turned into a field, and proceeded along a by-path together.

These two girls were great friends, though very different one from the other. Sophy was small, fair, and fragile, and looking as if a puff of wind would blow her away, while Jane was a big, awkward-looking girl, who, though she seemed both older and stronger than her companion, was in reality entirely led and governed by the gentle little Sophy.

“What did you think, Sophy,” said Jane, “when Mr Manners told us about the Confirmation? Don’t you think you shall be frightened?”

“I don’t know,” said Sophy; “of course it

is very awful, and very solemn, but I think I am glad, on the whole, that the bishop is coming this year instead of next. Dick was saying to me this morning that he should like to be confirmed too, so I shall ask him this evening what he thinks about it."

"Ay, do," said Jane, "and tell me in the morning what he says. You see my mother has no time for such things. What with toiling and moiling all day with the children, she never has time even to dress herself, and come to church on a Sunday."

"I wish I knew about the Holy Communion," said Sophy.

"Oh, Sophy, you never mean to say that you should think of staying for that," said Jane; "I thought it was only for old people, or at least for those who have plenty of time and teaching."

"I don't think that," said Sophy, "I remember hearing Miss Manners say once that if one was old enough to be confirmed, one was old enough to receive the Holy Communion, and I think it would help one to be good, and to remember one's Confirmation."

“Well, said Jane, “I am sure I should be afraid. I know I am not good enough to stay, and if I were to, all the neighbours would call me stuck up and proud, and that would make me worse than ever.”

CHAPTER II.

THE girls had by this time reached a lane in which their two houses stood.

The Turnbulls' cottage was small and thatched, with a pretty garden, which, early as it was, already showed some bright spring flowers.

The Prynnes' house was larger, but untidy, and with a great air of neglect and discomfort about it. The garden-gate was broken, and left wide open, so that the few cabbages, which were the only things growing there, were trampled and broken down by any stray animal that chanced to pass down the lane.

As it was with the houses, so, as is generally the case, it was with the inhabitants. Matthew Prynn, Jane's father, was a shepherd, who had regular work on Farmer Dobson's land, but he was not a sober man, and so of course his family suffered.

His wife was a slatternly woman, always behind-hand with her work, and worn to death with poverty, and the cares of a large family.

Jane was her eldest daughter, and had been generally kept at home to mind the babies, instead of being sent to school. Now, however, Miss Manners, the vicar's sister, had started a working class twice a week, and had persuaded Mrs Prynne to allow Jane to attend. It was after one of these classes that Mr Manners had taken the opportunity of announcing the intended Confirmation to the elder girls.

Sophy Turnbull and her brother Dick were orphans. They lived with their grandmother in the pretty thatched cottage in the lane.

Dick was lame, from an accident which had happened to him as a baby, and now, though he was sixteen years old, he looked quite like a child, as he was short and slight for his age, and his very fair hair and blue eyes gave him a remarkably youthful appearance. He was apprenticed to a shoemaker,

and was a clever boy, and making rapid progress in his trade.

Mrs Turnbull was very anxious to get Sophy a place as house-maid, or young lady's-maid, as soon as she was old enough; and, being a sensible woman, thought it was very important that she should be well taught while she was young. She therefore had always made a point of sending her regularly to school, and now Sophy, though she hardly looked more than ten years old, was at fifteen the head girl in the school, and really far advanced in the ordinary branches of education.

Dick had not come home from his work when Sophy entered the cottage, and as her grandmother had got everything ready for tea, she had nothing to do but to sit down and take out her work.

As she did so, she began telling her grandmother of Mr Manners' visit to the school, and that the time was fixed for the Confirmation.

"Did he ask you if you would like to be confirmed?" said Mrs Turnbull.

"Yes, granny," said Sophy, colouring with pleasure; "he said he should come and speak to you about it. You do not object, granny, do you?" she continued, seeing that Mrs Turnbull looked grave.

"My dear child, you are old enough; you are fifteen years old, though you do look so young; it is not that that I am afraid of; it is that I do not know if you have thought sufficiently about it to make up your mind really what a solemn vow you are about to take upon yourself."

"Dear granny," said Sophy, her voice trembling, and large tears rushing into her blue eyes, "I should like to be confirmed so much; I feel sure that it would help me to be good, only it would be dreadful to fall back and do wrong afterwards."

"It is not the fact of being confirmed that can make you good, Sophy," said her grandmother; "it is the grace of God given by Christ Himself to those who ask Him, and it is right that when we are old enough to understand our duty, we should take on our own heads the vows made for us when we

were infants by our godfathers and godmothers. But Mr Manners will be able to explain this to you much better than I can, and here he is now coming up the garden."

Mrs Turnbull opened the cottage-door, and received the vicar with a bright smile and a respectful curtsy, and, dusting a chair with her apron, begged that he would be seated.

"I am glad to find you and Sophy both at home," said Mr Manners; "I called to speak about the Confirmation, as I daresay you have guessed."

"Yes, sir," said Mrs Turnbull. "Sophy was just telling me of it as you came in. I should like her to be confirmed, if you think she is old enough."

"She is fifteen years old, is she not?" said Mr Manners, "and she has been regularly taught in the Sunday school, and I think she knows what a solemn thing Confirmation is. Have you thought much about it, Sophy?"

"Please, sir, I think I wish very much for it, only I don't know if I am good enough," said Sophy.

"My child," said Mr Manners, kindly, "that is not the question. We are none of us good enough in one sense, that is to say, we none of us deserve the grace of God through our own merits, but we know and are sure that He wishes us to strive for it to help us to be good, and that as we were made members of His Church by baptism, so we should take our baptismal vow on ourselves as soon as we are old enough to understand the nature and solemnity of the vow."

"I am sure, sir," said Mrs Turnbull, "that I am most anxious for Dick and Sophy to keep right, and to hold to their Church. I am sorry Dick has not come in to hear what you was saying, as he is a year older than Sophy, and wishes very much to be confirmed too."

"I was just going to speak about Dick," said Mr Manners; "I was going to say that I intend holding classes once a-week for the boys, and once a-week for the girls, and I should like to put down the names of both your grandchildren on my list."

"Thank you, sir; I will see that they attend," said Mrs Turnbull.

"I think of beginning to-morrow with the boys at seven o'clock at the parsonage, and Thursday evening, at the same hour, I shall hope to see the girls," said Mr Manners; "meanwhile, Sophy, I hope you and your brother will think very seriously over what I have said, and read the Confirmation Service with much attention and quiet thought, remembering that you are already soldiers in Christ's army, and that you have no right to draw back; but you must fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil. If you humbly seek to do your duty, and pray for God's grace to help you, you need not fear that you are unworthy to receive the special gift of the Holy Ghost, imparted through the "laying on" of the bishop's hands. You hope to receive the bishop's blessing, but he has no power to bless except as he receives it from God. Surely, therefore, it will be well for you to inquire what it is which you are to engage to do, so that your vow may *be made sincerely*, otherwise God, ' who

seeth the heart,' will not accept it, and your Confirmation, instead of being a blessing to you, will be a snare and a curse."

"Ay, indeed, sir, that is true," said Mrs Turnbull; "God sees our most secret thoughts, and we cannot deceive Him."

"I must not stay longer now," said Mr Manners, "as I have other people to see, but I hope Sophy and I shall have many talks on the subject."

Mr Manners rose to leave, and as Sophy held the door open for him to pass out, he gave her such a kind smile, that she felt she should never be afraid of speaking to him. When Dick came home from his work, Sophy ran to meet him and told him of the vicar's visit and all that he had said.

Dick was a thoughtful boy, his lameness prevented his mixing much with other lads of his age, and gave him a taste for quiet companions. He was very merry, too, and he and Sophy were a happy pair. They were very fond of each other, and had been so constantly together that their very thoughts *seemed one and the same.*

When supper was over, before they went to bed, Mrs Turnbull made them get their prayer-books and read the Confirmation Service carefully over, as Mr Manners had wished them to do.

Before they slept that night, the prayers of the grandmother and her grandchildren went up that they might be filled with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and the spirit of holy fear.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Mr Manners left the Turnbulls' cottage he went to that of the Prynnes. There the scene was very different to the one he had just left.

Mrs Pryne was engaged in what she called "righting up the house," a process that seemed to the looker-on to have the effect of adding greatly to the confusion, without lessening the dirt and discomfort. She left off, however, when the clergyman entered, and offered him a chair. Before he could be seated it was necessary to clear one for him, as each stool and chair had a heap of something or other upon it.

He was seated at last, however, in spite of the obstacles, and when a little peace was restored by the crying baby being sent upstairs and two little boys ordered to go and *play in the lane*, he began to speak to Mrs

Prynne on the subject of Jane and the Confirmation.

"I don't know about it, sir," said Mrs Prynne; "I doubt if I could find time to spare her for the classes, and besides, I don't know about letting young people set themselves up to be so mighty good."

Mr Manners was shocked at her tone, but seeing that she spoke from ignorance, and not intentional irreverence, he tried to explain away her mistaken ideas.

"In the first place, Mrs Prynne," said he, "I would not be doing my duty as your clergyman if I did not tell you that you ought to make every sacrifice to allow your daughter to attend these classes, where she will be taught what she ought to know and do at this most solemn period of her life, and then as to your thinking that to become a candidate for Confirmation implies that she would be setting herself up as better than her neighbours, I think you are utterly and entirely wrong; I know many parents feel as *you do*, but I think your clear duty is, instead of placing stumbling-blocks in the way of your

children, to help them in every way in your power in their onward course."

"I am sure, sir," said Mrs Prynne, "I am much obliged to you for your goodness in thinking about my girl, but the fact is, we are poor people and are obliged to bustle and get on as we can, and we have no time to think of these things."

"Oh, Mrs Prynne," said the vicar, "pray let me entreat you not to look upon it in this manner. If you do not wish to help your children onward, at any rate you have no right to hinder them. It is of the very greatest importance to children that their parents should have a right view of their duty in this respect, and so influence them accordingly. I know many people think they do all they need by saying nothing against it, and letting their children do as they like; and this is certainly better than hindering them; but we must recollect that God has given us our children to train for Him. They are like weak and tender plants that cannot stand alone, and God has chosen *their* parents for their first earthly props and

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bound them closely to them by the ties of love and dependence. When you would support a young plant in your garden, how carefully you plant a stick in the ground, and then, tying the little plant closely to it, that it may not be beaten down by rain or wind, you trust that the prop will support the tender flower. So we must do by our children; unless their props are upright and firmly rooted in Christ, our little plants cannot cling to them. They must not bend to the right or left, but stand erect, pointing to heaven."

"Indeed, sir, I have hard work enough to provide food for my children, what with my large family and with my husband being so given to drink; it is all very well for gentle-folks to act as you say, but with us poor people, each day brings work and trouble enough, without making more for ourselves by thinking of things beyond us."

"I see and feel your difficulties, Mrs Prynne," said Mr Manners; "and, believe me, I do not speak without knowing what a *hard thing it is to keep a religious spirit alive*."

in the midst of worldly care and troubles; but I feel also very sure that religion is a help and not a hindrance to us in our daily work. You have brought your children to church to be baptized, and they have all been made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. You cannot now draw back, they are in Christ's fold, and it is your duty, and one for which you will have to give account in the day of judgment, to see that the little ones whom God has given you may be carefully trained in the way in which they should go."

"Well, sir, I believe you are right, and I will see about letting Jane go to your classes. I am sure I would be loth to hinder her from getting what good she can."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mrs Prynne," said Mr Manners, "and I shall be very pleased to see Jane on Thursday evenings at the vicarage, and my sister hopes to give the girls some readings also in the course of their preparation."

Jane having put the baby to bed, had now
• come down-stairs again, and Mr Manners

spoke a few kind words to her, and then left the cottage. His solemn but affectionate words had struck a chord in poor Mrs Prynn's heart that had long been silenced by the cares and trials of her hard life. She thought of her own youth, and of her Confirmation, years and years ago, when she was very different to what she was now. She remembered, as if it were yesterday, the solemn service in the large church in which she had knelt with many other girls of her own age, and she remembered in a vague and indistinct way something which the bishop had said in his charge about the duty of coming frequently to the Blessed Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; but the time had passed, and at first she thought herself too young, and feared the laughter of her companions, and gradually the wish itself had died away, and so the great duty had been neglected and the great blessing despised. It was too late now, she thought; she could not bring back days and feelings that had long gone by, and now she must spend her *life and thoughts* on other matters. So she

reasoned with herself, and so she argued, and so as she continued the weary round of her daily work, the cloud of this world's cares and troubles came round her heart again and shut out that passing gleam of holy light that had found its way to her mind while the clergyman had spoken.

Poor Mrs Prynne, hers is a very frequent lot in life, and one for which very little pity is felt, because so few understand the gradual downward tendency of a mind which has nothing but faint memories left of what was once pure and holy.

CHAPTER IV.

IT is not our intention to follow Mr Manners in his round of the parish, but rather to try and repeat some of the instructions he was able to give to the candidates for Confirmation when they came to him to be taught, hoping that the words spoken to the girls in Hillford may be of some use and comfort to girls in other parishes in England who may be anxious to prepare themselves for the solemn rite of Confirmation.

The first week's classes held by Mr Manners for both boys and girls were taken up with a repetition of the Church Catechism, with such explanations and remarks as the vicar thought would be likely to help the young people before him in realising to a full extent their baptismal vow, and what it was that they were about to pledge themselves to on their Confirmation.

"My dear young friends," said he, after the *Church Catechism* had been repeated, "I *int to make you understand as clearly as*

possible what Confirmation is. First of all, on opening our prayer-books, let us observe what this solemn and beautiful service is called—we find it headed ‘The Order of Confirmation, or laying on of hands upon those that are baptized.’ These words alone tell us a great deal. We learn from them, first, that Confirmation is the ‘laying on of hands;’ and this act is not anything that has been invented or introduced into the Church in our own days, but has been in use from the very beginning. If you take your Bibles and turn to the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, you will read of this solemn rite even then in force in the early Church—‘When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. (For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.’”

From this passage, as well as several others in the Bible, Mr Manners showed the young

candidates that it is the duty of all who have been made members of Christ at their baptism to endeavour so to grow in grace that they may be able with a pure heart and earnest purpose to go on from strength to strength and take their vows on themselves when they are old enough to understand the nature and solemnity of them. He told them that knowledge was not all that was needed for a worthy reception of Confirmation. A further and much higher qualification is required and is of far greater importance than mere head knowledge. This qualification is *a right preparation of the heart.*

"Every candidate," said he, "should feel how solemn a thing it is to go into God's special presence to receive a gift from God as we really do in duly receiving any ordinance which He has instituted. Every candidate should feel also his unworthiness and sinfulness, and come like a penitent at the feet of Jesus, to beg for the pardon of his sins, and the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. The same mind should be in him which was in *David when he said, 'I will keep Thy ceremonies, O forsake me not utterly.'*

“That prayer uttered by King David was a prayer for God’s confirming grace ; and the like prayer is needful to every candidate for Confirmation.

“No one will come with a right mind to this holy ordinance, and in a fit state to receive God’s blessing, or to renew the vow made in baptism, who is not making the occasion one of more than usually deep and earnest prayers for divine grace and assistance. We are all weak and unstable creatures, and with many of us Confirmation is a turning point in life. With all of us it is a solemn point, and not to be entered upon carelessly and without thought.

“The disposition of the heart, I repeat again, my dear children,” said Mr Manners, “is of equal importance with right knowledge and sound faith. Each one of you feeling deep repentance and true humility, as sinners ought to feel, will beg for mercy and grace ; looking to our blessed Lord’s atoning blood for pardon, praying for God’s Holy Spirit to be confirmed and established in *grace*, and, in that strength, meaning in earnest to keep the vow and promise which

bound them closely to them by the ties of love and dependence. When you would support a young plant in your garden, how carefully you plant a stick in the ground, and then, tying the little plant closely to it, that it may not be beaten down by rain or wind, you trust that the prop will support the tender flower. So we must do by our children; unless their props are upright and firmly rooted in Christ, our little plants cannot cling to them. They must not bend to the right or left, but stand erect, pointing to heaven."

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tenderness, without having the power of showing their appreciation of it, if by any chance it comes to their lot.

Sarah lived with an aunt in a comfortable house some way from the village.

She was an orphan, having lost her parents when she was very young. She had never known what it was to want food, clothing, or kindness, as far as her aunt understood what was meant by the word "kindness;" but "Miss Gardiner" (as she liked to be called) was a hard woman.

If any one had said to her that she failed in doing her duty to her orphan niece, she would have answered indignantly that it was no such thing.

Sarah was better fed, better clothed, and less hard-worked than any other girl in the village; but I doubt very much if any one could have been found in Hillford who had fewer bright thoughts and less happiness than she had.

She was very quiet and reserved, and only showed her feelings to a keen observer by *her sharp, unkind judgment* of others. She *did not feel that she was of any use in the*

world, and she was always pitying herself for being so lonely and unloved, forgetting how very much it was owing to her morose and sullen disposition, and that if she had tried to meet others half way in little acts of kindness and gentleness, she would have not been left so much to herself as she was.

Bessie Sutton was bright and cheerful by nature, as great a contrast to Sarah as could possibly be ; but yet she was jealous, in her way, of the poor lonely orphan girl who envied her so !

It was very strange, but it was a fact, nevertheless, that these two young girls who might have done so much to help each other along the path of life, should have instead hindered one another.

They did not know it themselves, but what do we know of the thoughts and feelings of others, however nearly allied we may be to them ? Our lives may flow onward, side by side, like two streams, which seem to the casual observer very much alike ; but there may, nevertheless, be great differences, *unseen at the time, and only known when both streams have run their appointed course*

and have become merged at last in the great ocean of eternity !

“The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.” Did we but realise, a little more, how much good we could do by sympathy and kindness to our neighbours, I think there would be fewer sad hearts like Sarah Gardiner’s in the world.

Bessie was the child of very poor parents, and had very often known what it was to be in actual want of food and proper clothing.

Now hers was a nature that loved ease and comfort. She never could have understood Sarah’s troubles, even if they had been confided to her.

Sarah, in her eyes, was a person to be envied, for she had good clothes to wear, nice things to eat, and no hard work. Ease, luxury, and the outward adornment of her pretty person, were Bessie’s ideas of happiness in life, and to secure these for herself, she would have stooped to almost any mean action. Frank and open as her manner *seemed to ordinary* observers, Bessie had no *regard for the truth*, and no great care for

the future, provided she could have her comforts for the present.

Her mother was a laundress, and Bessie had to work hard to help her in her labours. Whenever she had a chance, she would get a day's work elsewhere, and, when this happened, she would always keep the money she earned, and spend it on some piece of finery for herself.

As the two girls walked home through the dark lane after the class was over, Bessie envied Sarah her nice warm jacket and thick boots, as her own garments were thin and scanty, and her feet but ill protected against the wet and mud of the road.

"I wonder if we shall be obliged to attend every class," said Bessie, "before we get our tickets for Confirmation?"

"I suppose so," said Sarah, moodily.

She had been more touched by Mr Manners' kind words than she cared to own, and was in reality longing to hear more of them, but she was much too shy to show her feelings; and, like many other reserved people, she rather tried to conceal her wishes *than otherwise.*

Bessie Sutton's reasons for desiring Confirmation were various and rather vague. She fancied that, in the first place, to be confirmed was to advance from childhood to womanhood at once, and to be thought grown-up was Bessie's great ambition. Then she rather liked the novelty of going to the vicarage in the evening to the classes; sitting in a comfortable room by a good fire, and perhaps catching glimpses of the young ladies in their evening dresses; and, above all, Bessie looked forward to the Confirmation-day itself as a great event in her life. To go to a church ten miles off, to see a bishop, and a number of grand people who were sure to be there, was the poor ignorant girl's idea of great happiness. Of the solemnity of the rite of Confirmation itself, I very much fear she thought but little. Her mind and thoughts had been so wasted and frittered away all her life in little, trivial things, that she had neither the power nor the will to grasp the great truths of religion.

I do not mean to say by this that to be a religious person it is necessary that you must have a strong mind, or great talents.

On the contrary, we know that "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings" praise has been accepted and welcomed on high ; but when the powers of thought and action given by God to man as a high gift are defiled, are only used for man's temporal advantage, then the last state of that man is worse than the first, and the things that should have been for his advantage only prove, as it were, an occasion for falling.

When the two girls parted from the rest of the class, and turned down the lane leading to their homes, Sarah left the others without a word ; while on all sides the sound of " Good night, Bessie," greeted her ears. What was Bessie, that people should seem all so fond of her, while no one took any notice of Sarah ?

Poor Sarah ! loneliness and want of sympathy was her great trial ; but she had not sufficient faith to see that that very trial laid on her was sent her in mercy, as indeed all our trials are if we could only view them in the right light. They are each, as it were, a prick from one of the thorns in our blessed Saviour's crown, sent to us to remind us that

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He has felt each and all for us, and with us. If Sarah could have sufficiently overcome her shyness to speak to Mr Manners on the subject of her loneliness of heart, he would probably have comforted her in this manner. He would have told her to throw her mind off her own trials, and think of what her Saviour had gone through. What was her lonely condition to His, who had to bear the fierce mockings of the multitude, the cruel cross and scourge, the agony and bloody sweat, for us men, and for our salvation !

“Behold, and see what are any sorrows like unto His sorrow ?” he would have said ; but the girl’s sharp, hasty manner prevented any one from guessing what an aching longing for love and sympathy filled her heart. When Mr Manners had spoken that evening to his class of Christ’s tender mercy and compassion, and of the gifts of the Spirit, Sarah’s proud, shy nature was nearly overcome, and she longed to cry out, and show her earnest wish for comfort, but her shyness restrained her ; and so it happened that Mr *Manners, glancing round at the faces of the girls, to judge of their characters by their*

expression, was quite deceived by the cold, proud look on Sarah's face, and little guessed that, under that cold and hard exterior, there beat a heart full almost to bursting in its longing desire for sympathy and affection.

“There are who sigh that no fond heart is theirs—

None loves them best.

Oh, vain and selfish sigh!

Out of the bosom of His love He spares—

The Father spares the Son for thee to die.”

It is very difficult to deal with a character such as was Sarah's. She seemed to repulse every effort made to win her confidence, and yet it was not from want of heart, but rather from the fulness and abundance of her feelings.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO days after Mr Manners' class, spoken of in the last chapter, Mrs Turnbull had a visit from a cousin who came from a town near; and, anxious to make her as comfortable as she could, she sent her granddaughter out to a neighbouring farm to see if she could get some fresh eggs and butter for her tea. Mrs Mayne, to whom Sophy applied, having supplied her regular customers, had none left at that hour in the afternoon; so she advised Sophy to go to Miss Gardiner's, as she kept poultry and a cow, and would perhaps be able to spare her what she wanted.

Miss Gardiner's house was generally the picture of neatness and comfort, so Sophy was rather surprised, on tapping at the door, to find the kitchen empty, and the whole place in great disorder.

She knocked a second time without getting

any answer, and she was just going to try her luck at another farm, when, Miss Gardiner hearing her, came down-stairs to speak to her.

"Yes, you can have some eggs and butter," said Miss Gardiner in a dry hard voice, "but indeed I hardly know what I have in the house, as my time is so taken up with that poor foolish girl Sarah since her accident, that I have no leisure to attend to my proper business."

"Accident!" said Sophy; "what is it, ma'am? has anything happened to Sarah?"

"Yes; the stupid girl slipped her foot last evening coming down-stairs, and hurt her ankle, and then was afraid to speak of it, so it was getting worse and worse all night, and this morning, finding her too ill to move, I sent for the doctor, and he said that one of the small bones of her ankle was broken, and that having been left so long unset was a very bad thing, and now it is as likely as not that the girl will be lame for life, and a burden instead of a comfort to me as she grows up."

Sophy was shocked at the unfeeling way in which Miss Gardiner spoke; but she only

asked if Sarah was awake, and if she might go up and see her.

"Yes, she's awake, and you may go up if you like," was the answer, ungraciously enough given by Miss Gardiner.

Sophy went up-stairs, and there was shocked to see the change which a few hours' severe suffering had wrought in Sarah. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes bright, but her mouth was tightly closed, and her lips pressed firmly together as if to keep in the cry of agony she could hardly help uttering. Severe pain had brought all her pride down to the ground, and she was as grateful now for a kind word or a look as she would formerly have been, for a great sacrifice made.

"Poor Sarah," said Sophy, "I am so sorry to see you in such pain. I must not stop now, as granny is waiting for the butter, but I will come again to-morrow and see you if you like."

"Thank you, Sophy," said the poor sufferer, "I shall be very glad to see you whenever you can come, 'tis so lonesome lying here in such pain."

From that time Sophy made it part of her daily duty to visit Sarah and to try to comfort and cheer her in her sickness.

As Sarah was of course prevented by her accident from attending Mr Manners' classes, Sophy was doubly attentive to what he said in order that she might be able to tell Sarah the next day; and the vicar himself visited the sick girl and tried to draw out her thoughts and feelings, and to see what she really knew and felt about the Confirmation vow she was about to take upon herself. The shy fit, however, generally came over Sarah when Mr Manners tried to get her to talk. She longed to say how much she felt, and to show him how grateful she was for his goodness, but somehow she *could* not speak, and more than once the good vicar left the house with a sigh, grieving over the coldness and apathy of the girl, while in reality her heart was full almost to bursting, and as soon as the door closed and he had left her, she would burst into an agony of tears and long to call him back again.

The doctor gave great hopes that Sarah would be sufficiently recovered to be able

go to the Confirmation, and as she wished to do so, the vicar did not like to prevent it, but fancying as he did that her heart was hard and stagnant, he would almost have been pleased to hear that a year's delay was necessary, hoping that her character might become softened in time. He little knew, as he gazed mournfully at the girl's cold, hard face, of the depths of feeling and the longing for a higher life that was hidden beneath that stony mask.

Sophy knew better; she saw how much it cost Sarah to break down the barriers of reserve and shyness and to talk even to her, so she contented herself with telling her all that she could remember of the vicar's instructions, and sometimes she would bring her Bible and prayer-book and read the references Mr Manners had marked for her, and the Confirmation Service and Catechism.

"Mr Manners says, Sarah," said Sophy, one day, "that we should examine ourselves daily to find out what we have done wrong, and if there is one fault more than another *that we notice* in ourselves, we must believe *that that is* our besetting sin, and try to make

resolutions against it, and think most of it when we confess our sins to God."

"There is a sentence in the Catechism very like that," said Sarah.

"What do you mean?" said Sophy.

"I mean the last of all," said Sarah. "What is required of them who come to the Lord's Supper?"

"Oh yes! I know," said Sophy. "To examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life, have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death, and be in charity with all men."

"But then, Sophy," said Sarah, "that means that we are to examine ourselves, and then to receive the Lord's Supper; but I don't think I could do that, at least till I am older, could you?"

"Oh, Sarah! I wish it more than I can tell you. When first we heard of the Confirmation I thought as you do, but granny and Mr Manners both talked to Dick and *me* and told us it is the great blessing in

Confirmation, that we are admitted to the Holy Communion by it, and that it is a great mistake to think people should wait till they are older before they come, for if they neglect it when they are young, the chances are, that they will go on neglecting it."

"But supposing one is not fit," said Sarah.

"Mr Manners made us read at the end of the Order for Confirmation last night," said Sophy, "that 'no one is to be received to Holy Communion till he has been confirmed, or is desirous to be so.' And he said that this showed that Confirmation is considered a fitting preparation for the Holy Communion."

"Well," said Sarah, "the Catechism says that we must lead a new life if we receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and I think that though we wish now to do what is right and good, and to lead a new life, yet supposing we were to fall back and do wrong, then it seems to me that we should be worse than ever."

"Mr Manners said," said Sophy, "that we should think of the words of the sentences *we learn, as well as the whole meaning, and it seems to me that that very sentence in*

the Catechism you are talking of should be thought of word by word. You know it does not say we are to pledge ourselves to lead a new life, but that we are to *steadfastly purpose* to do so; and surely that means that we are to try very hard to be good, and if we do so in humility and sincerity, God will help us."

"I never thought of that before," said Sarah; "I wish I could always have you to talk to about these things, you put them so plainly."

"It is what Mr Manners told me," said Sophy, "and not my own thoughts; but I am late, so must run home now. Good-night, Sarah."

CHAPTER VII

OLD MRS TURNBULL lived very quietly in her own cottage, and did not meddle in other people's concerns or gossip with her neighbours; but she was always ready to do a kind action for any one, and as she understood a great deal about nursing, she was frequently applied to for advice and help in any case of need.

It happened about this time that Mrs Prynne's baby was seized with violent convulsions in teething, and was very alarmingly ill. Before the doctor could arrive, the child had become so much worse, that in her alarm Mrs Prynne sent Jane to fetch Mrs Turnbull. By her care and sensible management, the baby rapidly recovered, and nothing could exceed the gratitude of poor Mrs Prynne to her neighbour for having, under Providence, been the means of restoring her child.

This little episode led to more frequent intercourse between the two cottages, and

Mrs Turnbull, seeing how difficult it must be for Jane to get any quiet time to think about her Confirmation, begged Mrs Prynne to allow her to come to her house, when she could be spared from home, to join in the readings she carried on by Mr Manners' wish with Dick and Sophy.

This plan was a great advantage to Jane, who though an honest, good-hearted girl, was very dull and could not exert her mind sufficiently to understand reading to herself.

Those quiet evenings in the cottage with the widow and her two grand-children, seemed like little pieces of heaven to poor Jane, so unused was she to anything but clamour and confusion.

"I wish I had had the chances that Jane has of being a good girl," said Mrs Prynne, one day to her neighbour.

"In what way do you mean?" said Mrs Turnbull.

"Why, being taught by the parson, and having books lent her by the ladies, and then it is a great thing for her to read with you of an evening. It has done her good already, I think, she is not near so rough

with the little ones as she used to be. When first the parson came and asked me to let her be confirmed, I was dead set against it, for I thought maybe it would set her up to think herself too good for the rest of us ; but Mr Manners is a nice gentleman, and he put it so, that I should have been ashamed to have refused him anything."

"I am sure you will not find that trying to do her duty will set Jane up or do her any harm," said Mrs Turnbull, "and I am very glad you did not refuse to let her be confirmed. Were you ever confirmed yourself?"

"Oh yes, when I was a girl in service in a large town I was, but we were not taught then as girls are now. The parson then just took our names and wrote them down in a list, then he heard us say the Catechism, and then gave us our tickets. I remember wishing very much at the time to be good enough to receive the sacrament, but I never did at the time, and now I suppose I never shall, at *least not till I am an old woman and have time for those things.*"

"*But perhaps you will not live to be an*

old woman," said a voice behind Mrs Prynne. She started as she heard these words, and turning hastily round, she saw Mr Manners, who had come to the door while the two women were talking.

Mrs Turnbull curtsied to the vicar and then took her leave, and Mr Manners sat down, and had a long talk with Mrs Prynne.

He spoke very kindly and earnestly, and pointed out to her how dangerous it was to put off doing what is right till we are old.

"How do we know," said he, "that we shall ever live to be old? and if we do, perhaps our minds and faculties may be impaired, and we may not be able then to do the duties which we are neglecting now. The longer a duty is neglected, the more difficulty we shall find in performing it, and besides, Mrs Prynne, the duty in this case is not a hard one, it is a great blessing that you are neglecting, and a great help and comfort you are despising."

"Indeed, sir, I do not despise it," said Mrs Prynne, "but I am so busy from morning till night, that I have no time to think of such things. It is all very well for the gentry and such folk as can sit still in their chambers

and think about such things, but from morning till night I am busy, slaving and toiling, and never coming any nearer the end of my work; so you see, sir, what with my large family and my husband being so given to drink, there is small comfort for such as me."

"I am indeed very sorry for you, Mrs Prynne," said the vicar, "such a life as yours is, must be a very hard one, but I think you are mistaken in supposing that religion is only meant for the rich and prosperous; it was, on the contrary, the 'weary and heavy laden,' that Christ bid to come unto Him. He knows all our troubles and sorrows, and if we come to Him and lay them at the foot of His cross, He will surely help and comfort us."

Mrs Prynne made no answer, and when Mr Manners looked at her after a moment, surprised at her silence, he saw that there were big tears gathering in her eyes, and then flowing down over her careworn cheeks.

"Oh, sir," said she, "if you only knew *what a struggle* such a life as mine is, day after day, week after week, and month after

month, you would see how little hope, or joy, or comfort there is for me."

"Oh, do not say so, Mrs Prynne," said the vicar; "God is always more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve; you have been baptized, you have been confirmed; so you have, by your own act, bound yourself to fight under Christ's banner; and yet now you hold back from this, your bounden duty, and neglect God's own invitation to His holy table, and, like the men in the parable who were bidden to the supper, you make your worldly business a reason for neglecting your spiritual welfare, and say as they did—'I pray thee, have me excused.'"

"But, sir," said Mrs Prynne, "I have neglected my church and my prayers for so long, that I am not fit to come to the Holy Communion; I should feel ashamed of myself if I did, knowing how badly I have been behaving all this time."

"Your past neglect is no excuse for your continuing in sin," said the vicar; "*it is quite a mistaken motion to imagine that absolute perfection is necessary in those*"

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who communicate. If we believe this, we shall at once see that no person on earth is fit to communicate, as we know that no one is *really* good. It is because we are not good that we are told by God to come to Him in prayer ; it is because we are sinful that we are baptized ; it is because we are frail and weak that we approach God in confession, and beg Him to give us forgiveness. All these, and more, are expressed in the Communion Service. There we confess our sins, we pray for pardon and for help. Should we need to do all these, if we were perfect, when we come to the altar ? As we struggle onwards, through the daily path of duty, if we lift up our hearts in faith and fear, and are strengthened and refreshed from time to time by the body and blood of Christ our Saviour, we may hope to approach nearer and nearer to true holiness ; we shall never reach it *quite* ; and, if we think we shall, we are deceived, for ‘ if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the *truth is not in us.* ’ ”

Mrs Prynne remained silent after the *vicar* had done speaking, but his words

were sinking deep into her heart. She longed for rest and comfort, and she knew that in religion they were to be found ; but she had always thought of that as of something far beyond her, and as something requiring a lifetime of leisure quite incompatible with her busy life. Those words quoted by Mr Manners seemed to open a new view of the subject, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Oh, how she would like to feel that God would give her rest !

"What shall I do, sir?" she cried at last. "I long to come, but I do not feel worthy."

"I will show you a portion of the Service for the Holy Communion, Mrs Prynne," said Mr Manners, "which will explain the proper frame of mind required of them who come to the Lord's Supper;" and opening his Prayer Book, he read the following words from one of the prayers:—

"We do not presume to come to this Thy table, O Lord, trusting in our own righteousness."

Again—"We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table."

Again, in another place—"Although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto Thee any sacrifice, yet," continued the vicar, "notwithstanding all this confession, and acknowledgment of imperfection, after we have received the Blessed Sacrament, we kneel down again and say—'We most heartily thank Thee for that Thou dost vouchsafe to feed us who have duly received these holy mysteries.' So that, being unworthy to receive them, is not incompatible with receiving them duly. If we should wait till we are worthy to receive them, we should never receive them at all. If we should think ourselves, or call ourselves *worthy* to receive them, that instant we should, in fact, be *unworthy*, because then pride, vain-glory, and a host of other sins, would take possession of our hearts, and Jesus Christ would be forgotten. So, Mrs Prynne, the fear of being unworthy need never keep you away, provided you wish and strive daily to become more and more worthy."

"Please, sir," said the poor woman, "I *should like to think of it, and take time before I come.*"

"Yes, do by all means," said the vicar, "it is too solemn a thing to be done without due thought and prayer; but do not put it aside to a more convenient season, and forget it. Begin this very night to pray for grace to help you to a right judgment, and let me see that you are in earnest in the work by attending more regularly to your duties. As regards the church services, begin next Sunday to come regularly, at least, to one service in the day, and strive earnestly to set your husband and children a good example at home; and now I must say good evening, as I have no more time to spare. Pray think over my words, and do not let the impression they have made die out."

"Thank you, sir, I am sure, for your goodness," said Mrs Prynne; "I will try to do as you wish."

The vicar then took his leave, feeling that he had been able to rouse some feelings in the heart of the poor woman, and earnestly hoping that his words might take root downwards and bear fruit upwards.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS MANNERS, the vicar's sister, took great interest in the young candidates for Confirmation, and did her best to assist him in the work of preparation. Whenever she had spare time she would visit the girls in their own houses, and try to draw them into conversation, and lend them books to help them to understand the great importance of the vow they were about, in the presence of God, to take upon themselves. She explained to them the difference between Baptism and Confirmation, and that in baptism we are made members of Christ, and children of God; but as in infants newly born, life is weak, and the powers of life need to be confirmed; so the children of God, the babes in Christ, those who have been baptized, need to have their spiritual life made firm and *strong*. Hence Confirmation is a sort of *perfecting or finishing* of Baptism. When *duly administered*, and duly received, it gives

firmness to the spiritual life, it bestows fresh grace, it is a renewal of God's promises to save from everlasting death, it is a renewal of His gift of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, whereby the soul is united more closely with Christ, and whereby the graft is more firmly fixed into the vine. All this and much more did Miss Manners try to impress upon the girls' minds.

She was a kind and gentle lady. Her health was delicate, and she led a retired life at her brother's vicarage; but though her strength was not equal to much exertion, her gentle influence had great weight in the village. All who came to her were sure of good advice and sympathy, and though she never spoke severely, her grieved voice and saddened face, when she saw any one doing what was wrong, had a wonderful effect among the young people of the village. The roughest boys were subdued when she came amongst them, and a smile from "the lady," as she was generally called, was considered something worth striving for.

The vicar was a widower, and his children were too young to be of much use in the

parish. His two elder daughters were at school, and the younger ones were still in the nursery, so the companionship of his sister was a great comfort to Mr Manners.

"What a nice boy Dick Turnbull is;" said Miss Manners, to the vicar one evening.

"Indeed he is," said Mr Manners; "he is so bright and civil-spoken."

"It is a pity he is so lame, poor fellow, it must be a great trial to a lad full of high animal spirits as he is," said Miss Manners.

"Yes," said Mr Manners, "and I believe he feels it so, and yet I think it may with him be a blessing disguised, as it keeps him from idle companionship, and makes him value his home more than he otherwise would. His master, John Green, the shoemaker, is a well-conducted man, and, I believe, is particularly strict with his apprentices, and he told me himself, the other day, that he had no fault to find with Dick Turnbull, except that now and then he was, as he expressed it, 'a bit saucy with his tongue;' but with *all that*, he had never heard him swear or use *a bad word*."

"*His* grandmother has brought him up

very well," said Miss Manners; "I assure you I think it is quite a refreshing sight to see old Mrs Turnbull with her spotless cap and apron sitting in that clean kitchen of hers with her two grandchildren by her; it is a great contrast to their near neighbour Mrs Prynne and her untidy home."

"It is indeed," said the vicar; "but do you know, I am beginning to think a great deal may be done with that poor woman, she has more heart and feeling than I could have believed. She spoke with great earnestness to me yesterday when I called there on the subject of the Holy Communion, and I was pleased to see that she had evidently thought a great deal of what I said in my last visit. Her house, too, looked tidier, and she told me that Mrs Turnbull had spoken to her on the subject also, and proved to her that religion does not interfere with daily work, however menial that work may be."

"Who sweeps a floor
As for God's law
Makes that and the action fine,"

said Miss Manners.

"Yes, our favourite George Herbert was

"I am sorry," said Mr. Manners, "that the
 people of this church have not been
 more interested in the things that interest others
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 people of this church have not been more
 interested in the things that interest others
 and that they have not been more
 interested in the things that interest themselves. I have
 been very much interested in the things that interest
 older people, who seem to be awaking to the
 thought that perhaps they too have done
 wrong by neglecting the means of grace
 offered to them in the Lord's Supper."

"It is a great point gained when once you
 can induce people to own themselves in the
 wrong, and surely it must have a good effect
 on the most careless when they see the elderly
 men and women who are now anxious for
 Communion."

"Yes," said Mr. Manners; "I cannot tell
 you what I felt when I was talking to those
 people, one of whom is quite

old; it seemed as if they were coming to Christ again as little children to be taught."

"I hope the effect of your teaching will be lasting, and not only the result of temporary excitement."

"That we must leave in higher hands," said the vicar; "we must not expect to see the fruits of our work, but we may humbly pray, that after casting our bread upon the waters, we may find some of it at all events after many days. The great work we have to do is by God's grace to try and lead people to repentance, because repentance, if sincere, conveys at once the intention of amendment, for it not only denotes remorse for the past, but a change of mind, an alteration of the feelings and opinions in regard to sin, and in regard to God. I always feel that any one who comes in the right spirit to communicate, must feel not an abstract and general love only of Christ as *God*, but a tender intimate love for Him as *man*, as our friend, love of His character, love of His person, love of His doctrines, which are all conveyed to one's *mind* in the expression, 'a thankful remembrance of His death.'"

"Indeed," replied Miss Manners, "it seems to me that repentance implies an intention of keeping Christ's commands, 'Ye are my *friends* if ye do whatsoever I command you.' So that repentance and love will work together, under the grace of God, to alter the character, to amend and to improve it, and it seems impossible that any man can really have a 'thankful remembrance of His death,' without at the same time 'steadfastly purposing to lead a new life.' And yet we know that many, from habit or from a wish to preserve outward respectability in the eyes of their neighbours, come time after time to the Lord's Supper without thought or self-examination at all."

"It is not only repentance for past sins that is required, but faith to believe in the promises of God. Why should we love Christ unless it were that we believe that the sacrifice for which we love Him will procure our salvation? By His Cross and Passion He has opened unto us the gates of heaven. A new life, an advancing life, a life, *as far as it is possible*, of perfection is to be *our aim as Christians*, and God being our *helper*, the Holy Spirit our guide, and Jesus

our intercessor, it may be reasonably hoped that we shall 'bring forth fruit in due season, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred-fold.'"

Mr Manners paused as if overpowered by the flood of deep feeling these thoughts brought with them; and his sister, after remaining silent for some time, asked him if he had spoken in this manner to his adult class the night before.

"Yes," he replied; "I tried as well as I could to make them see the difference between a cold nominal repentance and a hearty desire to forsake sin. You know the difficulty with most people is to make them understand that to fall back into sin after receiving the Holy Communion, does not imply absolute perdition. That we may, after the strongest resolutions of amendment, yet fall back into sin, is allowed by any one who knows what the weakness and frailty of our mortal nature is. But this may exist without any violation of sincerity on our part. The two things are perfectly distinct; yet the resolutions *constantly* repeated must in the end, though *they be broken time after time, prevail*

Like a drop of water, which, by continuance, shall wear away the hardest rock, so a good resolution sincerely formed and kept to the best of our power, however weak that power may be, yet shall with those helps of grace superadded, which the Christian knows how to ask, overcome the fiercest temptations and destroy the most inveterate habits, of which the human mind is capable."

"That is exactly what I was wishing to explain to Sarah Gardiner to-day," said Miss Manners, "but I could not make her quite understand what I meant."

"The duty is to form the resolution," said her brother, "and to form it with sincerity, to intend to the best of our strength to wrestle with the evil of our nature, to be watchful against surprise, and to be humbly believing in Christ's power to help us. When we go to the Lord's Supper, we must go with a mind resolutely intending to improve, not lazily satisfied with past attainments, or with a vague and dreamy admiration for holy *things*, but *advancing*, pressing onwards, day by day, never resting, never content, but *looking forward* to our future life with it

tense longing, and remembering who it was that said, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.'"

At this point of the conversation the vicar was interrupted by the opening of the door.

"Please, sir," said the servant who entered, "a message has come from Miss Gardiner's. Sarah is taken much worse, and wants to see you if you will be so good as to go to her."

Mr Manners obeyed the call, and was soon walking through mud and rain on that cold April night, to visit the poor sick girl.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Mr Manners arrived at Miss Gardiner's house, he found Sarah indeed very ill. She was in a high fever, brought on by the excessive pain in her ankle. The doctor said that the broken bone had not been properly set, because of the inflammation which set in before he was sent for, and that was the cause of the violent pain she had suffered.

Mr Manners went up-stairs at once, and stood at the sufferer's bed-side. At first she lay with her eyes shut, and evidently quite unaware of his presence. She was talking to herself in low incoherent sentences. He caught the words Confirmation and Holy Communion several times, and at last she raised herself partly in bed and exclaimed—

"Oh, how I wish the parson would come, he would tell me."

"I am here, dear child," said Mr Manners,

leaning over her, and taking her thin burning hand in his, "what is it you want me to tell you?"

"Oh, sir! is it really true that I shall die? I heard the doctor tell my aunt so when they thought I was asleep. I cannot bear to die, and now just before the Confirmation, too, when I wanted so much to be confirmed."

Here she paused, exhausted, the wild look left her eyes, and she sank back, fainting on her pillows.

Mr Manners saw that she was not in a fit state for talking, so after assisting the nurse in bringing her round, he knelt down and said a few words of prayer by her bed-side, and then thoughtfully left the cottage.

He saw now how much feeling had lurked beneath Sarah's cold manner, and he felt grieved that he had not discovered it before. Now the poor girl was evidently most seriously ill, and it was doubtful whether she would ever recover. He could only hope that some of the words he had spoken to the class generally had made a deeper impression upon *her* than he had fancied at the time.

Sarah got daily worse and worse, for a

week after that night, the fever raged, and she was often quite delirious.

The doctor looked grave when he was questioned as to her chances of recovery, and said he feared much that she would sink from weakness when once the fever left her.

Miss Gardiner was constantly in her room, tending her most carefully; and it was remarked by all who saw her that her face was more gentle, and her manner less hard, than they had ever known it. During this time of trouble, she had, of course, no time to attend to the duties of the house, so Bessie Sutton was sent for to attend to the cow and poultry, and to keep the house clean.

Bessie could work very well if she chose, and did so when the eye of her mistress was upon her, but hers was eye-service, for no sooner was Miss Gardiner safe out of the room, than she would leave her scrubbing or brushing, or whatever she was about, and amuse herself in an idle way, by peering into all the cupboards and boxes to see what they contained, admiring her pretty face in the glass in the parlour, or looking out of the window at the passers-by.

One afternoon, as she was so engaged, she saw a young man come to the door with a pack on his back.

"Any dresses or shawls wanted to-day," said the bag-man, as he saw Bessie.

"No thank you," said Bessie; "there is sickness in the house, and the missis is up-stairs, but I am sure she does not want anything."

"What! she is up-stairs, and has left you all alone—how dull you must be!" said the man. "I declare it is a shame to treat a pretty girl like you in such a manner! Come, I am a good-natured fellow, and have a few minutes to spare, so I will just open my pack and show you some of the elegant things I have with me."

Bessie thought this very good-natured of the man, and as she dearly loved finery, she pressed eagerly forward to look at the goods the man displayed to her.

Dresses, shawls, veils, and silk handkerchiefs were shown her, till she longed to possess them. One dress in particular took her fancy more than all the rest. It was a bright pink muslin with white spots on it.

What a lovely colour it was! and how becoming it would be to her complexion!

It was with a sigh that she assured the man that much as she admired his things, she could not afford to buy any of them.

"It does not matter, I assure you;" said the man, artfully holding up his goods and showing them to the best advantage. "It is a pleasure to show them to any one with such good taste as you have; I see you admire that pink dress, you are quite right, it is the most superb thing and quite the favourite colour this year among the upper circles."

"It is lovely!" said Bessie; "I wish I was rich enough to buy it."

"Ah! it would suit you admirably, and it is wonderfully cheap too, only nine shillings and sixpence."

"But I have not nine shillings and sixpence to give for it," said Bessie, mournfully.

"Would not your mother help you?" said the man.

"Oh, no! I am sure she would not; she was very angry last night when I told her I must keep my wages to buy a white bonnet

for the Confirmation in May, instead of giving some of it to her for the house-keeping.

"What a pity," said the man, artfully, "this pink dress with a white bonnet would be just the very thing for you to wear at the Confirmation."

Bessie looked longingly at the tempting object, but said nothing, and the man began folding up his goods in his pack, and preparing to go.

"I shall be round again this day week," said the man, carelessly, "and I will look in again, in case you manage to make up the money; it would be a thousand pities if you were to lose the chance of getting such a becoming dress."

Bessie at this moment heard Miss Gardiner's voice calling her, so she ran up-stairs, just as the man was shouldering his pack and preparing to leave the house. She was detained some minutes up-stairs; and when she came down again, the man was gone, but there lay the pink muslin dress on the table!

He must have left it there by mistake, she thought; so she ran out into the lane to see

if she could call him back, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"He will be sure to come back when he finds he has forgotten it," thought she, so she placed the coveted dress in a drawer of a large old-fashioned press in the parlour, for fear it should get dirty.

She put the dress out of sight, but she could not put it out of her thoughts, and many times in the course of that day she ran to the parlour to have a peep at it, and when she looked at herself in the glass, the foolish words of the packman came back to her, "It would be a thousand pities that you should not have this becoming pink dress."

Poor silly girl! she was laying up for herself a store of sorrow by indulging in these feelings of vanity.

Vanity was Bessie's besetting sin, and as vanity is a *feeling*, not an *action*, it comes upon us before we are aware, and therefore is, perhaps, more difficult to cure than any other fault.

The best way of stopping it, is, not by reasoning against it, but by checking our thoughts continually. If this is done per-

severingly, we shall learn, almost, as it would seem by instinct, when our imaginations are becoming vain, and shall put a stop to them without being obliged to pause and consider ; just in the same way as we turn back and check ourselves suddenly, when we find ourselves running into any bodily danger.

There are habits of thought as well as habits of action ; but they are difficult to acquire, and easily lost, and therefore, too often, persons think it impossible to attain to them.

It would have been well for Bessie if she had known where her silly vanity was leading her. She might have then paused in time, but one sinful habit indulged in always leads to another, and so the heart becomes hard, and we cease to see our own danger.

Bessie Sutton's ideas on the subject of Confirmation were, as has been shown, exceedingly vague. Her heart was so set on the pomps and vanities of the world, that she had no room left for holy thoughts and good desires. We must put away from us all hurtful things, all bad passions, and evil

desires, before our bodies become fit to be the temple of the most holy God.

It was Thursday, and the day for the girls to assemble at the vicarage for their weekly class. Mrs Turnbull, who was always kind and neighbourly, begged Miss Gardiner to spare Bessie to attend it, undertaking to do her work for her in the meantime.

The girls assembled at the vicarage at the given hour; there were fourteen of them in all, and Mr Manners looked round on them with a kind smile as he entered the room, thinking how nice, and modest, and well-behaved they looked, and hoping that Confirmation would be the turning point in many of their lives, and bring a real blessing from above upon them.

CHAPTER X.

"**T**HERE are certain occasions on which it is very important to us to look back upon our past lives and examine how they have been spent, in order that by thinking seriously of our faults, we may be enabled, through the help of God's Holy Spirit, to repent truly of our former sins, and also to guard against them for the time to come. Such occasions, my dear young friends," said Mr. Manners, "are Confirmation and a first Communion, for being then on the point of solemnly renewing our baptismal vows, and offering ourselves for admission to the highest Christian blessing, the Lord's Supper, it is especially needful to be in earnest in struggling against the temptations which so easily beset us. I have talked to you already of the need we have to set ourselves to work in earnest to try and root out the smallest traces of evil we find lurking within us; and now when you are about to be admitted by Con-

firmation into the full fellowship of the Christian Church, in which you have hitherto been but children, *now* is the time to examine yourselves by the light of the gospel, and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

"In order to make this clear to you, it is necessary to go over subjects with which you have been familiar from your childhood, so I will begin my lesson to-night by asking you to tell me what was your baptismal vow, the promise made for you by your sponsors?"

Sophy. "That I would renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts or the flesh."

Mr Manners. "Yes, that is the first vow; now, Bessie, tell me what was the second part?"

Bessie. "That I should believe all the articles of the Christian faith."

Mr Manners. "And the third?"

Jane. "That I should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life."

Mr Manners. "Yes; that is the vow you

are now going to take upon yourselves in the presence of God. He, for His part, took you for His child in your baptism, and now the time has come when you are required to give your full assent to this act and deed on your behalf, before God, on His part, will confirm His former deed. Thus, the service of Confirmation begins by the assertion, that only those are to be confirmed, that is, to have the outward act of laying on of hands, and the inward gift of God's Holy Spirit, who know the terms on which salvation is to be had, and who are prepared of their own act and deed to accept those terms. Open your prayer-books at the service, and will you, Mary, read the latter part of the Exhortation?"

Mary. "To the end, that children being now come to years of discretion, and having learned what their godfathers and godmothers promised for them in baptism, they may themselves with their own mouth and consent, openly before the Church, ratify and confirm the same; and also promise, that by the grace of God they will evermore endeavour themselves faithfully to observe such

things as they by their own confession have assented to."

Mr Manners. "Now, Jane, tell me in three words what those things are which your god-fathers and godmothers promised for you?"

"Repentance, faith, and obedience," said Jane.

Mr Manners. "What are the three things you promised to renounce?"

Sophy. "The devil, the world, and the flesh."

Mr Manners. Now, girls, I entreat you to pause and consider what those three words represent. First, you promise to resist and fight manfully against our great spiritual enemy the devil, who goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. As we have a real enemy to fight against, so we must seek for a real friend to help us in the great battle. God, the Holy Ghost, will help us if we ask Him, and will clothe us in His spiritual armour. Tell me, Grace, what is the 'whole armour of God?' Look in *Ephesians, the sixth chapter and tenth and following verses.*"

Grace. "Finally, my brethren, be strong

the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood therefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Mr Manners. "This is the Christian's armour, and with these weapons you are called upon to 'fight the good fight of faith:' 'Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.' 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.' Avoid bad companions, and try to keep on the straight and narrow way by the help of God's grace. We pray God not to lead us

into temptation, let us see that we do not wilfully put ourselves in the way of it. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. You promise also to give up the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; do not delude yourself with the idea that this is an easy promise to keep, or that you will be able of your own strength to keep it. It is hard, very hard, to live in the world, and yet not of the world; and so with the third thing we have to renounce the heart. Purity of heart is the only real safe-guard for purity of conduct. We must watch against the entrance and indulgence of evil, vain thoughts in ourselves, and we must also be very careful how we do or say anything which may encourage such a tone of mind in others. I do not wish to frighten you by thus pointing out the difficulties of a Christian life. If you really mean to do your best when, in the presence of God and man, you pronounce that solemn 'I do' on your Confirmation day, you need not fear but that the seven-fold gifts of the *Spirit will be given to you, and will help you onward on your course.* When temptation comes, resist it through the grace of

God, which never fails those who ask for it, and then, when the temptation is over, you will feel stronger and better able to resist the devil the next time he assails you. Think of your Saviour who was tempted and who resisted. He was led up of the Spirit to be tempted of the devil. Three times the tempter assailed Him, but three times was he beaten back. First came the temptation of the senses, 'Command that these stones be made bread.' Next, the temptation of vain glory, 'If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down.' Again, the temptation of worldly power, 'All this will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.' But it moved not the Holy Jesus! He was tempted like as we are, He had like feelings, like passions to ours, but He failed not! Oh, think on that wonderful scene! Think how He withstood temptations, and pray Him as a Friend to stand by you, and enable you to resist the devil, and to be proof against the allurements of the world and the weakness of the flesh. However warm and sincere *your resolutions* may be at the time, however *earnestly* you may purpose to devote your-

self to God, yet you must look at once and always to God for help; lay your weakness at the foot of that cross where He who went through human life and felt human weakness for you died. Make Him your 'guide unto death,' and He will never leave you nor forsake you. And now we come to the second part of our vow—Faith.

"Do you honestly and sincerely believe all the articles of the Christian Faith? This is a question you must each put to yourselves. When you go home to-night, I should like each of you to repeat to yourselves the Apostles' Creed, sentence by sentence, examining yourselves by each, to see if you have ever thought enough about it to believe it with all your heart and mind. If you can feel this, and if you feel that you wish to renounce the devil and his works, and to repent you truly for your sins past, then you will find less difficulty in realising the third part of your vow, 'Obedience.' If we firmly believe in Christ's great sacrifice for us, then, loving Him above *all things*, we shall have a pleasure in obeying *Him*, and walking in His faith and fear.

"What does the bishop say after the

candidates for Confirmation have made their vow and said 'I do?'"

Sophy. "Our help is in the name of the Lord."

Mr Manners. "Can you think why he says this at that moment?"

Sophy. "For fear we should make the vow, meaning to keep it in our strength."

Mr Manners. "Yes, he leads you to feel the need of God's help, for in His name only can you find grace and strength to make or to abide by your choice; and as if the sense of your own weakness came strongly upon you, you carry on the words of the bishop, and declare that you look for help in His name 'who hath made heaven and earth.' Then the bishop will give thanks and say, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord;' and you take up the word of thanksgiving, and say, 'Henceforth world without end.' After which the bishop pours forth a prayer for help, and beseeches the Lord to hear, 'Lord, hear our prayer,' when you add, 'And let our cry come unto Thee.' And now we come to the prayer which the bishop calls upon the congregation to offer up with him, 'Almighty and ever

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baptizing him, who has promised to regenerate these Thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins, strengthen them, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and daily increase in them Thy manifold gifts of grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of Thy holy fear, now and for ever, Amen.' This beautiful prayer states, first, what God has already done for your soul, what mercy you have already received in baptism when you were made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven; and then it goes on to ask God to 'confirm His former gifts,' to increase them; 'Strengthen them,' such are the words; 'strengthen them, we beseech Thee, O Lord,' which means, confirm them, make them stronger in the faith. And how is this to be done? Even by the Holy Ghost the Comforter. This is *the very end and object of Confirmation;*
// ~~to~~ obtain the strengthening gifts or

the Holy Ghost, that, just as on the first Christians the apostles' hands were laid, and they received the Holy Ghost, so you, by using the same means of grace, have the same gift as they had. You do not come to it as a mere outward, lifeless ceremony, but as an act, which, if rightly performed, enables you to receive wonderful spiritual power, gifts and graces, strength, help, and blessing from above. All this you need; you need to be strengthened in your path; you need spiritual support; you need your heavenly Father's blessing, and you need continual help and guidance, and hence the bishop prays God after this manner, 'Daily increase,' in those that are confirmed, 'Thy manifold gifts of grace, and fill them now and for ever with the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit.

"Why should you think, Mary," continued the vicar, "that the Holy Ghost is spoken of as 'sevenfold?'"

"To enable Him to help us in different ways," said Mary.

"Yes," said the vicar, "as our needs and *our temptations* are different, so we need *diversities* of gifts of the self-same Spirit.

But now you must go home, girls, as it is late. Think of all I have said to you, and let your preparation for Confirmation be earnest, and real, and not mere lip-service.

CHAPTER XI.

BESSIE SUTTON looked anxiously out of the window very often during the next few days to see if the packman was coming back for the pink dress ; but days passed by, and she saw nothing of him. Meanwhile she spent a great deal of time every day in looking at the much coveted treasure, and the more she looked at it the more she longed to have it for her own. The drawer in which she had placed it was full of odds and ends belonging to Miss Gardiner ; little boxes and baskets, and several things of the same description, at which Bessie had no business to peep. Bessie had, however, no feelings of honour, and she thought there was no harm in satisfying her idle curiosity. One day she opened a small japan box, and looked over its contents. There was a rusty pen-knife, some boys' marbles, and in the corner a small coin. She turned the things out on the floor to look at them, and, to her surprise, she found

that the coin was apparently gold—it was a half-sovereign, with the head of George III. upon it.

“It is really gold,” thought she, “Miss Gardiner must have put it by and forgotten it; I wish it was mine, I could have the pink dress if it were, and I don’t believe Miss Gardiner knows that she has it, she would never miss it.”

With a sigh of envy she replaced the coin in the little box, and put it back in the drawer. She took another look at the muslin, it seemed to her fresher and prettier than ever.

All that night visions of herself in the pink dress floated before the silly girl’s mind’s eye—if that half-sovereign were but hers, she thought, would not that be delightful?

Scarcely anything is more difficult to decide than the question, in what the pomps and vanities of the world consist? They differ according to the circumstances of each individual. The luxuries of a palace, and ornaments, and costly dress, are not, for instance, *wrong for a queen*, because they properly *belong to her high station*. But then we *must remember* that they do not bring the

same temptations to a queen that they would do to a person in a different station of life who would not be accustomed to them.

The queen, probably, having been all her life used to these things, never thinks of them at all, and so they are not the snare to her that the pink muslin dress was to Bessie Sutton.

Miss Manners had written out some texts for the girls to read often during their preparation for Confirmation, and one of these was :—

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever,” (1 John ii. 15–17.)

These words were well known to Bessie, but it is to be feared the knowledge of them had gone no further than her mind; they had *not* penetrated into her soul, and so the good seed sown in her heart fell on stony ground

and withered away, because it lacked the moisture of the dew of heaven, which is like God's grace.

The days passed away, and still the dress lay in the drawer, and still the packman did not come for it.

"He will surely come to-day," thought Bessie, as she looked longingly at her much wished for treasure.

At last his step was heard in the lane, and Bessie's heart beat wildly. A fearful temptation seized her, she opened the japan box, seized the half-sovereign, and ran with it to the door.

"I have got the money, sir," said she, breathlessly, "and I wish to keep the pink muslin dress." So saying, she held out the stolen coin to him.

"Ah! I thought you would manage it against I came again," said the man, carelessly taking the money. "I must give you back sixpence, unless there is anything else you would like instead," and he was proceeding to undo his straps and open his pack.

"Oh, no, indeed, please not!" exclaimed Bessie in a fright. "I am wanted up-stairs

and my mistress will be very angry if she hears me talking."

Her distress was so very evident that the man was surprised, but as it was no concern of his, he gave her the sixpence change, and walked on.

It was done! She was a thief. Bessie, with all her longings for the dress, had never thought she could have sunk to that depth, but the temptation had come to her, and she had not withstood it. She had not put on the whole armour of God, and so one of the fiery darts of the devil had struck her unprepared. .

She felt much frightened when she saw the man go away; it was too late then to draw back. Then came the second temptation, "After all, there was no harm done. The pink dress would be much more useful to her than the money was to Miss Gardiner, who had evidently forgotten all about it, and," as Bessie thought, "if people were so careless with their money, they deserved to lose it."

She made an excuse for a walk that evening, by pretending that her mother wanted

her at home, and hiding the parcel under her shawl, she carried off the dress to a young woman who was a dréssmaker, and asked her to make it up for her.

When once the dress was safe out of the house, Bessie's fright began to lessen. "Miss Gardiner was never likely to miss the money, or if she did, she would not guess that Bessie had taken it," and so the accusing voice of conscience was stifled, and another sin was added to those Bessie would one day be called upon to give an account of.

Meanwhile, Sarah lay up-stairs quite unconscious of all that was going on below. Her strength was failing fast, and she had caught a cold which fell heavily on her in her weakened state.

Sophy was constantly at her bedside, as Mrs Turnbull, seeing what a comfort the little girl's gentle ways were to poor Sarah, allowed her to be with her as much as possible.

Under her influence, and by the teaching of Mr Manners, Sarah began to see the particular form of evil into which her besetting sin had led her. She had kept her feelings

so much to herself, that it was long before she could even now realise the extent to which her over-scrupulousness on very small and insignificant points had come between her and her clear knowledge of her duty. She had read of good people in books, and the lives they lead seemed to her so pure and holy, that nothing short of perfection was to be borne according to her views. Now, however, as she lay on her bed of suffering, a veil seemed to be gradually withdrawn from her eyes, and the full beauty of Sophy's simple Christianity shone forth to her.

Whatever Sophy had to do, she did heartily, not hurrying it over as if longing to have done with it, and not doing it with self-satisfaction, but each duty seemed to come naturally to her, and to be done without any thought of herself; and in this sweet unselfishness, Sarah now discovered, lay the charm of Sophy's character.

We all think we know what unselfishness is, but there is more in it than most people think. There was no selfishness in our *Blessed Lord*. He never spared *Himself* when any one wanted His help. He nev

sought His own glory, or to do His own will! How different is the spirit of the world to the spirit of Christ! How many of us live only for self, love self above all things, and seek before all else to please self?

The question that suggested itself to Sarah's mind now was, "Am I living for self, or am I trying to be unselfish like my Saviour?" This is a question which it would be well if all would ask themselves. There are so many different kinds of selfishness. First, there is the selfishness that shows itself in thinking only how to please one's self without giving a thought to the wishes of others, a selfishness which asks only, "What shall *I* eat? what shall *I* drink? and wherewithal shall *I* be clothed? how shall *I* amuse myself?" This was the sort of selfishness that Bessie Sutton had given way to, and we see by her example what a dangerous thing it is to suffer to grow in the heart. Then there is the selfishness which shows itself when a person is ill or in trouble, and makes him forget to be *thoughtful for others*, a selfishness which is *always complaining* and fretful, and which *expects every one and everything to give way to*

it, and which will not even try to be patient and cheerful. And then, more than all, worse than any other kind of selfishness, there is the selfishness of vanity, a selfishness which is always trying to put *self* forward, which wants the first place for itself, which likes to be made much of, to be highly thought of by others, and which is therefore discontented and out of spirits, or out of temper if it cannot attain its end.

This was the kind of feeling that had led to Sarah's unhappy life. If she could have been content to see others loved and happy without envying them, she would probably have been more loved and happy herself. Selfishness in one form or another is at the root of nearly all our sins; for two feelings are for ever struggling in the human heart—the love of God, and the love of self, and till we have determined that, by God's grace, *self* shall be kept under, we shall be always falling into sin.

Great opportunities of self-sacrifice do not often come to us, but little opportunities *come* nearly every day, and if our lives are to be calm and good, we must be ready at

all times to sacrifice self. Doing this will not only make our lives good and useful, but happy.

Thoughts such as these filled Sarah's mind after listening to Mr Manners' kind words of teaching, and as she lay in pain and agony on her dying bed, she mourned and lamented deeply over her past selfishness and wasted opportunities for doing good.

Now, as her life was drawing to an end, her heart was softened completely, and she longed to feel herself worthy to enter into that rest which she knew was prepared for her in heaven. Yes! she was dying! her young life was fast drifting away, and though she would fain have lived on, and tried to lead a higher life, she was content to leave it all in God's hands.

One thing she longed for most ardently, and that was, that she might be permitted to receive the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper before she died.

All her hardness of character had melted away, she seemed like one whose spirit had *been purified* by suffering, and her longing *wish was that ere she left this earth she might be admitted into the fullest and highest privilege of a member of Christ's Church.*

CHAPTER XII.

MR MANNERS was on his way to visit Sarah the following day when he was surprised to see two policemen stopping at the gate.

"Is anything amiss?" said he, as they respectfully stood aside to let him enter.

"Yes, sir, we have a warrant to apprehend a girl who lives here as servant-maid," said one of them.

"Indeed! I think there must be a mistake," said Mr Manners. "Miss Gardiner keeps no servant."

"No sir, not in a general way, I know," said the policeman, "but there is a girl called Sutton working here now, and she it is we have to take before the magistrates for passing off bad money as good."

"I must inquire about this," said the vicar. "I hope and believe there is a mistake. Perhaps she did not know the money to be bad."

"That may be, sir," said the policeman.

"but there is so much bad money about, that the magistrates are determined to make a stand about it, and last night a commercial traveller slept at the Dragon Inn in the next village, and paid his bill this morning with a bad half-sovereign. The landlord found it out, and the man swears he got it from this girl here."

"It is a bad business," said Mr Manners; "but this man is a stranger, and how are we to prove that he is speaking the truth, and not wilfully putting the fault on an innocent person?"

"The only way to prove her innocence is to bring the girl before the magistrates to see what she has to say in her own defence," said the policeman, knocking at the door as he spoke.

After a few moments' delay, Miss Gardiner opened it herself, and seemed much surprised at the sight of such unexpected visitors.

Bessie was called for in vain; she was nowhere to be seen. They searched kitchen, *and parlour*, and every corner of the house *where it was possible she might be hidden, but without finding her.*

"What has she done?" said Miss Gardiner.

"She has tried to pass bad money for good," said the policeman, "at least, the bag-man swears it was she who gave him the bad half-sovereign, and, really, her having hidden away in this manner does not prove much for her innocence."

"A bad half-sovereign!" said Miss Gardiner, turning pale, "where could she have got it from? will you step inside a moment if you please while I look in my drawer?"

So saying, Miss Gardiner led them into the parlour, and opened the drawer in which Bessie had placed the dress.

There was no pink muslin there now, however, the dress having been, as we know, taken to the dressmaker's by Bessie. But Miss Gardiner opened the small black box, and drew from it, with trembling hands, an old pen-knife and two or three marbles. In vain she shook the box and examined the corners carefully, there was nothing else there.

"I see it all now," she exclaimed, "she is a wicked girl, and the sooner she is taken off to prison the better!"

She then proceeded to explain the history to Mr Manners and the two policemen.

Years ago, when Miss Gardiner was young, her whole affection was given to a little brother, a delicate child, who died early, and for his sake she kept treasured up in a little box that had been his, a few of his possessions. The old knife and the marbles had been amongst his favourite toys, and she remembered as if it were yesterday, that an uncle of his had sent the child from London a set of imitation coins, with which he was much delighted. They were all lost or thrown away except this little brass half-sovereign, which she had carefully put away in memory of the dear child now dead.

This explanation was quite clear, and proved the pack-man to have spoken the truth; but, at the same time, it proved Bessie's guilt.

Mr Manners was much distressed. He remembered that Bessie had attended his Confirmation classes most regularly, and as far as he could judge from her manner, had *seemed* seriously to wish for Confirmation. *Such* conduct in one so young and who *seemed* so innocent was a terrible thing.

Meanwhile, the policemen continued their search in every direction for the culprit, and for some time in vain. At last, one of them happening to glance upwards to a loft above the cow-house, caught sight of a piece of a print dress hanging on a nail. There was no ladder near, though Miss Gardiner assured him that there had been one she knew that morning. Another, however, was soon found, and the policemen mounted it and got into the loft, where, hidden away among some straw, sat Bessie, trembling and crying with fright. She had seen the policemen coming up the lane, and her conscience telling her of whom they were in search, she had taken refuge in the loft at the back of the house, and dragging the ladder up after her, had felt tolerably safe while the house was being searched.

Poor Bessie! this was the end of her vanity and love of dress! If it had not been for that, she might now have been innocent instead of being a thief! In order to be smartly dressed at the Confirmation, she had fallen into this great sin, and now *she was led off a prisoner to the magistrates in humiliation and disgrace.* What a change

a few short weeks will work. This was Mr Manners' thought as he turned away from the sad sight of Bessie's trouble, and prepared to go to the bed-side of Sarah Gardiner.

When the Confirmation classes had been begun, there had appeared very little difference to the casual observer, between any of the girls ; but now a great rent seemed opening in the little circle, and two out of the number at least were separated from the others by a great gulf fixed !

Sarah, with all her sufferings, was far, far happier than Bessie, for Sarah now had learned to feel Who it was that afflicted her, and to leave all in her heavenly Father's hands, knowing that He would do all things well. The more she thought about heaven, and the more she tried to be patient, even as Christ was patient, the more full of joy and peace she was, because she felt that the things of this world were passing so fast away that it was not worth while being anxious and troubled about them.

It has been well said, "One word from Christ at once calmed the troubled sea; one

glance from Him to us can do the same with us now."

Many times during the day little trials of temper came to Sarah; sometimes the high wind would make the door slam, sometimes the hot sun came in at the window and made her eyes ache, and the pain would keep her awake during the long night hours, longing, and yet dreading, for the day to dawn, but she tried to overcome her fretfulness, and every time one of these trials came, she would say to God in her heart, "Teach me to be patient, help me not to give way to temper." And we may be sure that she did not ask in vain!

CHAPTER XIII.

MR MANNERS visited Sarah very often now, and as time went on, and she became more and more resigned to the great change that was drawing nearer to her every day, she looked forward to the vicar's visit with intense longing, knowing that he would help her in every way in his power. He knew of her great wish to be allowed to receive the Holy Communion before she died, and knowing the rule of the Church was, "There shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, *or be ready and desirous to be confirmed,*" he felt that he could not be doing wrong in granting her request. He explained to her that the Church takes the will for the deed, that though she insists on outward forms as conveying inward grace, yet where *the outward forms are impossible to be obtained, she dispenses with them, and supposes that inward grace may be obtained in*

we are really in earnest in wishing to receive it.

Early one morning, about a week before the day fixed for the Confirmation, a great change came over Sarah. Her cough left her, but her weakness increased to such an extent, that it became evident to those who were watching her that the end was very near. Mr Manners was sent for, and he at once saw that the holy service should be held without delay.

Sarah smiled faintly as she saw the simple preparations being made in her room ; she was too weak to speak, but her mind was still perfectly clear.

Miss Manners came too, to join in the service, and knelt with Miss Gardiner by the bed.

The peace of God that passeth understanding filled that little room as the solemn feast was held, and the watchers drew near with faith, and received that blessed sacrament to their great and endless comfort.

Sarah lay quite still when it was over, very quiet, but so happy. She had been led into green pastures, and fed with

spiritual manna from on high, and now that she was about to pass over the dark river, to traverse alone the valley of the shadow of death, she feared no evil, for she knew that the Good Shepherd would be near, and His rod and His staff would comfort her.

Miss Gardiner did not wish to prosecute Bessie for her theft; so, after being taken before the magistrates and warned against a repetition of her sin, she was sent home in disgrace, the magistrates rightly judging that her loss of character and the remarks of her neighbours would prove sufficient punishment.

The history of her sin and its sad consequences had been carefully kept from Sarah, as her friends did not wish to pain her by the account, but it had a great effect on Miss Gardiner. She knew she had never really loved her niece till now, all her tenderness had been given to the memory of the little brother who had been taken from her. Like many other silent, self-contained people, she had kept her one sorrow so long hidden in *her heart*, and brooded over it so often in *private*, that it seemed at last to absorb her

whole nature, and prevent her from feeling any love and sympathy with those around her.

When in her surprise at the loss of the child's coin, she had betrayed the story of her life, she was astonished at the relief it gave her to speak of it. Mr Manners had spoken so kindly to her on the subject, and not at all as if he was surprised, that the poor woman felt for the first time what a relief it was to her long pent-up feelings to know the blessing of sympathy.

We most of us know how pleasant it is to have some friend to whom we can tell all our trouble and all our joy, being quite sure of sympathy.

Now, the Bible shows us how full of sympathy our Blessed Lord was. In the story of the widow of Nain, we read that when Christ saw the poor mother crying so sadly as she followed the funeral of her only son He had compassion on her; He felt for her sorrow and said to her, "Weep not." And then, when by His great power He had brought her son to life again, He was not

merely satisfied with that, but He waited to see him come to life again, and He delivered him Himself to his mother, thus showing her that He took part in her joy just as much as He had taken part in her grief.

This is true sympathy which bids us rejoice with them that do rejoice as well as weep with those that weep.

This is a Christian grace and virtue we should all try to cultivate, and at no time is it more important for us to think of these things than in the solemn period of preparation before Confirmation.

If we wish to have the "mind of Christ," we must think a great deal about His sympathy, and we must try all we can to follow His example. We must try to feel for those that are in sorrow. It may often happen that we can do nothing to help those who are unhappy, but we can always listen kindly when they tell us of their troubles, and we can ask God to help them, though we cannot do so ourselves. And we must learn also to be *really glad* when others are pleased. We *must not allow* envious feelings to remain in

our hearts, but we must pray to be able to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to be as glad as if the happiness were our own.

Mr Manners' sympathy was a great and lasting comfort to Miss Gardiner. It seemed at last as if a ray of sunshine had penetrated the icy crust which years of reserve had frozen round her heart.

When once the sunshine of hope can pierce its way through the clouds of despair, then indeed there is promise of dawn after long night!

Sarah sank very rapidly after the day in which her great wish was realised, and she was permitted to receive the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

It seemed as if God granted her a lull after the storm of her illness, for now she lay without pain, patiently waiting for the end which she knew was very near.

And so it was. One night as she lay quietly as usual in her bed, her aunt sitting by her, she raised herself suddenly from her pillows, a bright smile upon her lips as she whispered, "Yes! my Lord and Saviour, I

am ready." She then sank back again in her bed, and with one long sigh, her spirit passed away. Her short life on earth was over, and now an eternal life was to begin.

"Oh, happy retribution,
Short toil, eternal rest
For mortals and for sinners,
A mansion with the blest."

CHAPTER XIV

SARAH'S funeral took place two days before that appointed for the Confirmation.

It was a lovely spring afternoon ; the birds were singing in the budding elm trees round the old church, and the flowers had already begun to scent the air with their sweet perfume.

All these things the vicar noted as he walked to the church to join the funeral party, and they seemed to him to speak of the happy resurrection, and of the life everlasting.

So they laid her to rest, under the shadow of the noble trees, and close by the church in which she had been baptized.

Several of her school-friends stood by that newly-made grave, and as the class of girls met that evening at the vicarage, for the last time before the Confirmation, the remembrance of that scene lingered amidst them, *and it was with unusually serious faces that the little party took their seats.*

The vicar was scarcely less moved than either of the girls as he joined them.

In that short six weeks of preparation, how much had happened in that little band ! Two out of the original party were absent ; one, owing to her own sin, was excluded from the circle, and debarred from the blessed privilege of Confirmation ; the other, having been ready and willing, had received the blessing, and now was taken away from the cares and troubles of the world, and admitted into the glorious liberty of the children of light ! She was made at her baptism an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, and now, by God's grace, she had entered into her heritage. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is," (1 John iii. 2.) "Now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face," (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty : they shall behold the land that is very far off," (*Isa. xxxiii. 17.*)

We call ourselves inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and say that we hope one day to

take possession of our inheritance; yet it is strange and sad to find how small a portion of our hearts is really given to this future blessedness.

We need awakening to the fact, in the same manner as it was brought home to the Hillford girls by Sarah's death, to make us realise it fully.

May the God of hosts, whose dwelling is in eternity, and whose kingdom is the kingdom of all ages, fill our hearts with earnest longings to enter into those courts where He reigns in never-ceasing glory. May He grant us His continual help, so that, despising the pleasures of the world, and going on from strength to strength, from virtue to virtue, we may at last appear before our Saviour Jesus Christ in Sion more than conquerors through the merits of His precious death and blood.

Mr Manners' last lesson to the girls was a very short one. He did not go over the grounds of all that they had before been taught, and merely begged them to remember *what* he had told them before, and never, never to forget, that in all the battle of life,

they were Christ's soldiers, bound to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue faithful unto their lives' end.

He begged them to be ever on the watch against the crafts and assaults of their ghostly enemy, remembering that he attacks each person on their most unguarded side. He knows our faults and weaknesses a great deal better than we do ourselves, and is always on the look-out for a weak point in our characters at which to point his arrows. Against him, Mr Manners told the girls, they should resolve, with God's help, to be ever striving, never giving consent to any of those wicked thoughts which he throws into the mind, nor complying with any of those temptations whereby he solicits us to sin. And particularly to resolve to avoid all "pride, malice, and envy, all treachery, lying, revenge, and cruelty, which are most properly the works of the devil."

"To do this, girls," said Mr Manners, "we *should resolve* to be steadfast in the belief of *the being of a God*, that in this glorious God-head there are three persons, the Father, the

Son, and the Holy Ghost. These and all other points of the Creed, with the words of which you have been familiar all your lives, it is now your bounden duty to make quite sure that you really and truly believe. Not lazily accepting the belief as it has been taught you, and as a whole from which it is too much trouble to differ, but taking it sentence by sentence, and asking yourselves seriously if you feel with your whole heart that you can say, 'I believe, before each.'"

Mr Manners then added a few solemn words on the duty of receiving the Holy Communion, a duty and a privilege to which the previous rite of Confirmation would admit them.

"I am very sorry to part with you, my dear young friends," said Mr Manners, "I feel as if these little meetings had drawn us together as Christians should be drawn together in Christ's Church, but I hope we shall all meet many many times in a more blessed and Christian way at the feast which God will invite you to. Do not let the serious *impressions* of to-day fade away without *bearing some fruit*, and let your Confirmation

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be a mark set in your life to which you will never be ashamed to look back. I feel a great and warm interest in you all, and I trust sincerely that this time of Confirmation may be blessed to you. Life is short, and death often comes suddenly upon the youngest of us. You have to-day seen one of your number laid in her last resting-place on earth. Who can tell whose grave will be the next to be dug in this quiet church-yard, whose soul next called to stand before its judge?"

With these solemn words, Mr Manners took leave of his young catechumens, after their six weeks' careful training, hoping that, on some of them at least, the lessons had not been bestowed in vain. Before they left, he gave each of the girls a card, on which was printed a prayer, to be used by them before Confirmation, and as this prayer is a very good and simple one, I will copy it here, hoping that it may be found useful in other parishes besides Hillford:—

A PRAYER TO BE USED BEFORE CONFIRMATION.

"O most blessed God, by whose grace I was called into a state of salvation when I

was baptized, and from whom cometh every good thought, desire, and purpose, which I have since felt in my heart; assist me, I beseech Thee, in the new dedication which I am going to make of myself unto Thee, whose I am and resolve to be to the end of my days. Be pleased to confirm me in my grace, and to strengthen me with might by Thy Holy Spirit in the inner man, that I may ever choose those things which are acceptable in Thy sight. Arm me, good Lord, against all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, with a will steadfastly resolved never to yield to any of them. Enable me to persist faithfully in the performance of the vow, which was made in my name when I was baptized, and which I now intend, with my own mouth, to renew openly before Thy Church, whose devout prayers in my behalf I beseech Thee to hear, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

* This prayer is taken from a tract on Confirmation, No. 87, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

CHAPTER XV.

THE long talked-of Confirmation day dawned at last, and the large church at Fairfield was thronged from end to end.

It was a beautiful sight to see that goodly company of young disciples, binding themselves solemnly to stand by their heavenly Teacher—a band of soldiers declaring themselves ready to fight under the banners of Christ, their chosen Captain. Full of bright joys and hopes of youth, with their young hearts not yet weighed down with the cares and sorrows, or sins, as it may be, of later years, they are able to offer to God a simple, trusting faith, with no fear or misgiving. Not fear or misgiving should those young Christians feel, but a holy awe, a heart full of love to God and trust in Him, yet of reverence and godly fear.

Feel your own helplessness, grieve over your sinfulness as you may, but trust in

Christ. He has treasures of spiritual strength which can never be exhausted, and which on this day He is preparing to pour forth upon you.

These were the thoughts that filled Mr Manners' mind as he saw his young flock take the places assigned for them in the church.

It was their Confirmation day, the day on which the germ of all that is holy, and "pure and lovely, and of good report," was to be so blessed as to bring forth fruit unto eternal life.

Mr Manners had tried to impress upon the young people the necessity of keeping their thoughts fixed as much as possible upon the solemn service, and the vow which they were about to make. Some time he knew would elapse before the beginning of the service, and this he advised them to employ in prayer and meditation. He told them that by kneeling they would be better able to encourage a devotional spirit, and be the better able to keep their eyes from wandering, *but he advised them not to weary themselves.*

Bodily fatigue is often a hindrance to devotion, and therefore, if the time was long before the commencement of the service, he told them not to hesitate to change their posture, and to sit and read passages of Scripture instead of attempting too long prayers.

At last the service began, and after the first address was read, the bishop, speaking in a clear, grave voice, asked the important question—

“Do ye here, in the presence of God and of this congregation, renew the solemn vow that was made in your name at your baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you?”

Then throughout that vast church echoed the young voices, in that short but important sentence—

‘I do.’

A moment's pause followed, and it seemed to Miss Manners as if then the recording

angel was registering the vow in heaven, then the bishop took up the sentences and said, "Our help is in the name of the Lord."

And so this long, long thought-of vow was made; all these young persons, come together from many neighbouring parishes, had at the same moment, and in those two short words, enrolled themselves of their own free will, and as it were, afresh under that banner of Christ, which their godfathers and godmothers had promised for them in their infancy that they should fight under. No ear but that of God can distinguish one voice amongst the many in that short vow; no eye but the Almighty's can look into the hearts to see how sincerely and how earnestly the vow is made. But there is a day coming, when, in the presence of God, and before angels and saints, each one of us will have to stand forth alone, to hear our sentence for eternity, and the words which we repeat at our Confirmation will then be recalled, either to our infinite blessing, or to our unspeakable shame!

Sophy Turnbull was among the first girls who were led up to the bishop to receive the

gift of the laying on of hands. She had looked forward to that day for so long, with such mingled feelings of hope and fear, that when the time actually arrived, it seemed to her more like a dream than a reality. She knelt where she was told to kneel, and tried to arouse herself and really to *feel* what she was about, but she was positively incapable of taking in any clear impression, and only succeeded in realising the fact that she was in God's presence and about to do something very important in her Christian life.

This is frequently the case, I believe, with many very good Christians in their most solemn moments, the mind is acted upon so much by the body, that bodily fatigue or an over-excited brain frequently prevents that clear religious frame of mind so delightful at important times.

Jane Prynne knelt next to Sophy, and her disposition being much calmer and less excitable than Sophy's, her prayers were very earnest and simple, and the poor hard-working, and by no means clever girl, sent up her *Confirmation* vow to God with perhaps a

deeper sense of its meaning and high importance than many others far more educated and quite as anxious to do right as she was.

Miss Manners had warned the girls of the possibility of this feeling, as she knew how often great emotion seems to deaden the heart and almost stupify the mind. She told them if this feeling of insensibility came over them, the best thing was to try, as calmly as possible, to say short sentences of prayer, or even verses of hymns meanwhile, as very often a mechanical repetition of a well-known form of words will have a far greater effect in arranging the scattered faculties of the mind than any other process.

Sophy was frightened as she felt this numbness creeping over her mind, but by degrees as she sat trying to listen to the bishop's charge, her thoughts became more collected, and she gradually began to realise the solemnity of the service in which she had been engaged.

God sometimes uses Confirmation as a call to arouse the careless. It is to many the *first step* in performing the vows of baptism.

—the point from which they consciously start their race, but it is grievous to put off so long. It is better to begin then than not at all, or than later; but we should be much happier if we began in childhood, and indeed Confirmation is hardly a starting-point in those who have been well instructed as Sophy had been.

If we purposely put off trying to perform our vows till our Confirmation, thinking that is time enough, it is very unlikely we shall begin then.

We may renew our vows, but most likely it will be a mere form. We must not look upon Confirmation as a sort of charm, which will set everything right for us, but as a call to work more diligently, a gracious call from God, which, if we listen to, He will give us renewed gifts of grace.

If, however, you have not started already on the race, then Confirmation may indeed be a call, a starting-point, which you will be wise to avail yourselves of.

Who can say what were old Mrs Turnbull's feelings as she saw her beloved grandchildren

kneeling in Fairfield Church, and listened to the bishop's voice as he prayed God to "defend them." And when the service was over, and the long drive home accomplished, the little party at the cottage that evening were as happy and thankful as any household in the village.

Still greater joy was in store for that aged woman, when on the following Sunday she knelt with her two grandchildren as together they received for the first time the blessed sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. Jane Prynne was there, too, with her mother, who had now begun regularly to attend the Church services, and who found, that instead of hindering her in her daily work, the holy words and hymns seemed rather to help her onward on her way. Miss Gardiner, also, was there, dressed in deep mourning, but with a calm and softened expression of countenance, which was to Mr Manners a sign of a great change in her heart. There were others, too, at that holy communion for the first time. Those elderly men who the vicar had *persuaded* to be confirmed.

As the vicar looked at them all in the church, he breathed a fervent prayer, that having received God's confirming grace by the hands of an earthly bishop, they might one day, young and old, rich and poor, be owned as good and faithful servants by the great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

THE END.

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